



Vincent C. Gray
Mayor

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Department of Parks and Recreation

Office of the Director



Jesús Aguirre
Director

September 18, 2012

Nick Keenan
Chair
Board of Directors
Stoddert Soccer League, Inc.
3265 S Street NW
Washington DC 20007

Dear Mr. Keenan,

It has recently come to my attention that you are sharing information with the community that is inaccurate and misleading. I'd like to take a moment to share with you the context for DPR's action that I know the Stoddert staff were aware of but, perhaps, you were not. I also feel the need to correct several misstatements in your recent communication. Specifically, I'd like to address:

- the increasing demand for DPR fields across the city,
- the actions DPR took as we worked to assign field time to Stoddert during this season's field allocation process, and
- the actual allocation of field time to Stoddert this season.



The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) is responsible for regulating the use of over 100 athletic fields across the city, and our goal is to ensure the residents of the District of Columbia have access to a variety of programs and activities. DPR does well to accommodate as many requests as possible in this urban setting where field space is often limited. In fact, during the most recent field permit season, we received over 500 applications from over 150 organizations requesting field space. These valuable resources are in clear demand and we working to make them available to as many groups and organizations as possible.

Over the past few years, field space in the District of Columbia has become a hot commodity. Fields that were once considered unplayable and, literally, dust bowls, are now thriving with high-quality natural or synthetic turf. As the condition of our fields has improved, the requests for usage have also increased. Community members are asking for "open community time" at their local field, more leagues are being created in response to residents' interests, and DCPS and charter school athletic programs continue to expand. Also, as we work to improve the condition and quality of our fields, we often take fields off line for maintenance and conditioning, further reducing the available inventory on a temporary basis.

In light of these increased demands, DPR works diligently to maintain a fair and balanced process for allocating use of fields. DPR has also been working to improve our own programs by expanding programmatic opportunities through our "Move, Grow and Be Green," initiative. Through this initiative, our own programs are more focused, of higher quality, and relevant to the

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interests and requests of our residents.

There has been much discussion regarding the process that DPR has used to provide permitted field time to groups such as Stoddert this fall, and I wanted to clarify the record. Although we often have groups that are disappointed when they are unable to get all of the permitted time they request, several of the messages that are circulating regarding Stoddert's situation are, at best, misinformed.

During our field permit windows, DPR is in constant contact and negotiation with many groups and individuals as we work to offer time and space to as many groups as possible. By working with the various groups in this manner, we're able to creatively solve many challenges as we work to serve organizations that support our mission of improving the quality of life for residents. As you know, we even took the extra step to meet with your staff before you submitted your requests to ensure we had a clear understanding of your needs.

Further, during our negotiations with Stoddert, we specifically informed your staff that Stoddert would be receiving automatically generated denials because they had submitted multiple requests through our online application system and we wanted to provide one permit per field to better track and manage your permits. As one of our largest users, we were already working hand in hand with your staff. My staff communicated almost daily with your team to meet as much of Stoddert's requests as possible as we worked through your concerns and additional requests. As you know, Stoddert requested 100% of the key after-school time at each of the 12 fields that your organization uses in our inventory, exclusively in Wards 2, 3, and 4. It is simply not possible – nor appropriate – for a single private group to monopolize so much public field space, no matter how worthy the program or activity. We've also offered your organization access to some of the other dozens of fields in our inventory in other parts of the city. Your group has turned those offers down. Of course, there are very real logistical challenges for parents to drive across town during the after-school hours, but this is less challenging during weekend hours.

It's also disingenuous for you to allege that Stoddert's prime competition for field space is from private schools. In fact, only four private schools that requested field time received any time. DCPS and charter schools also competed with Stoddert for field space, as did DPR's own programs. Of course, Stoddert is simply using good business sense by preferring our fields, as our costs are much, much lower than the cost of field time at private schools and DCPS schools. Still, I am aware that you also take advantage of field space at private and DCPS schools, as well as in Maryland and Virginia.

I have also acknowledged that DPR has work to do on improving upon our timeliness in terms of allocating field space and notifying users of their approved space. We're committed to doing this, as we know it presents real challenges to your organization and the many volunteers that work with you. Unfortunately, our biggest hurdle is that we often have to wait for some of our other large users to submit their requests (i.e. DCPS and charter schools) before we can make final allocations. We could certainly take a hard line and strictly adhere to our deadlines, but that would surely have significant impact on the youth served by those organizations. Still, we

continue to address this and I am confident we'll have improved services as we move forward.

It's also important to note that Stoddert has, in fact, received the majority of permitted time on most of the fields you are using, and in some cases up to 100% of the permitted time outside of the school day. Stoddert has a large program and is one of our heaviest private users. Your use essentially blocks out any non-soccer and non-Stoddert users during most of our field time in those areas, and this goes against our goal of equitably allocating public resources. If a resident in the area wants to participate in any other program when Stoddert is in season, they have few, if any, choices available.

Of all permitted time (outside of the regular school day) at each DPR field that Stoddert uses, your organization has the following proportion:

- Carter Barron: 65%
- Hardy: 100%
- Francis: 48%
- Hamilton: 100%
- Ft. Stevens: 73%
- Hearst: 85%
- Jellef: 57%
- Palisades: 84%
- Ft. Reno: 49%
- Shepherd: 60%
- Stoddert: 10%
- Rudolph: 100%

I very much appreciate the fact that practice time is limited during the fall and winter months and we worked to give you additional time at several fields, including Palisades, Hearst, and Stoddert. We're also concerned that Stoddert does not actually utilize all of the time you request. In fact, by Stoddert's own admission and website, you "*always end up with leftover time once everything is scheduled.*" (http://www.stoddert.com/Fields/index_E.html) This is disappointing especially in light of how vocal you were when you discovered that one of the permitted groups at Palisades was not present on one particular Friday evening.

DPR welcomes continued and honest discussion around how to most equitably allocate field space to the many users that request it. Unfortunately, I can safely say that the challenge will only become greater as we move forward, as more and more user groups will continue to request space.

Best,



Jesús Aguirre